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The Doctrine of Act and Potency is the Key to an Adequate Understanding of Persistence in Identity

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Abstract

The debate of how one persists over time has been an old issue in philosophy. While some philosophers argue that there is no persistence in personal identity, others say that there is persistence in identity, and they propose properties like body, person's name, memory, and psychological connectedness as those essential properties that persist over time. This paper looks critically at some of these positions and would argue that the properties like body, person's name, memory, psychological connectedness, etc., are all insufficient to account for persistence in identity for various reasons, but for the main reason that they ascribe personal identity to things that are in potentiality, meaning that they are changeable. This paper suggests that to understand the property that persists over time and how and why it persists over time, there must be an in-depth understanding of the doctrine of act and potency proposed by Aristotle. This paper also explains why the debate on persistence in personal identity is still relevant in our contemporary world.

Keywords: Personal identity. Persistence Overtime. Psychological connectedness. Act and potency. Numerical sameness.

Introduction

The debate of where one's personal identity lies and whether it persists over time has been a long discussion with still no concluding point, which I fully expect to be the case; after all, the value of philosophy lies in the continuity of the debate. While some thinkers argue that we do not have personal identity, others think that we have, but it does not persist over time. Similarly, others believe that we have personal identity, which persists over time. For instance, David Hume (1739) argues that our identity lies in our perception, but it does not persist since our perception changes over time. A. J. Ayer (1963) contends that the thing that makes us who we are is our body, and we persist over time because one remains in the same body from birth to death.

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On the other hand, John Locke (1690) holds that we have an identity, which lies in our consciousness, and how we persist over time is by retaining same consciousness in the form of memories of ourselves. Derek Parfit (1971) suggests that there is nothing like personal identity, and one's survival over time depends on a higher degree of connectedness with past experiences. The significant thing about these theories is that they identify different properties as that-which-makes-us-who-we-are; our identity. Two implications can be drawn from this significance; either (a) that we do not understand our personal identity or (b) that we are yet to grasp how this personal identity persists over time.

Just to clarify, I use the concept of personal identity strictly, to mean how one sees oneself over time, making reference to what endures or changes in a person. This encompasses things like your character, personality, profession, upbringing, knowledge, and looks. This article so focuses on the issue of the nature of personal identity and its endurance across time. Anytime one asserts that a person living at one moment is the same as a person existing at another time, one is making a personal identification judgment.

So, in this essay, I argue that understanding Aristotle's doctrine of act-potency is the key to understanding persistence in personal identity. I explain that most theories that tried to explain or pin down personal identity ascribed what-makes-us-who-we-are or the essential attributes of our personal identity to those attributes of a human person that have the potential to change. Consequently, they make the mistake of either affirming that there is no persistence in identity or elevating some of the human properties, which are capable of changing, as what makes them unique and the same over time.

To achieve this task, I will divide this paper into four sections. In the first section, I will critically analyze the contributions of Hume, Ayer, Locke, and Parfit to the personal identity debate to show how they fail to show how to ascribe personal identity to those human attributes that can change. Given this problem, the second section will aim to establish the essential characteristic of a human person by employing Aristotle and David Bostock's (2006) understanding of form (essence) and matter. The third section will then explain how Aristotle's doctrine of act and potency helps us to understand what persists and why it persists. Then the fourth section will also explain why and how this discourse is relevant to our contemporary lives. I will conclude this paper by suggesting ways to develop this debate further.

1 Personal Identity and various theories

The concept of personal identity provokes questions like, who am I? What makes *me*, me? How am I different from the rest of the people in the world? To answer these questions is to understand what one's personal identity is. When I say personal identity, I mean that essential attribute or property of a person that makes one unique and different from others in society. Then persistence in personal identity asks the question, what does it take for a person to persist from one time to another? Persistence in identity refers to how one is the same person over time despite some glaring or apparent changes. Hence understanding personal identity and its persistence have to do with understanding what makes one different from the rest and what makes one the same person over time. This raises the question; how can one maintain their personal identity despite many apparent physical changes?

First, I have to make some clarifications. When I use the concept 'sameness', I am referring to numerical sameness and not qualitative sameness. According to Peter Geach, "things with qualitative identity share properties, so things can be more or less qualitatively identical" (Geach, 1973). This means that when some things are said to be qualitatively the same, they exactly resemble the other, for they share the same property. For example, dogs are qualitatively the same because they share the property of dogs. By sameness in this context, I mean numerical sameness. According to Geach, numerical sameness "requires absolute, or total, and can only hold between a thing and itself" (Geach, 1973). This suggests that the two things with some physical differences are one thing. For example, if I wear the same shirt I wore yesterday, but today it was slightly burnt because of the hot iron, both shirts are numerically the same.

Now that the clarification is clear, I will examine the theories of personal identity suggested by various philosophers to understand what makes us who we are and whether it persists over time.

1.1 David Hume (Bundles of Selves)

The Philosopher David Hume (1739) argues that our identity lies in our perception. For Hume, this results from the fact that "the associative principles, the resemblance or causal connection within the chain of my perceptions gives rise to an idea of myself, and memory extends this idea past my immediate perceptions" (Hume,

1739:178). However, since we constantly perceive different information, Hume believes that our perceptions change, and we can never find an impression of self that explains personal identity. Hume writes, “For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception” (Hume, 1739:173). Hume claims that we cannot perceive ourselves when we try to because there is no constant self but rather bundles of selves. However, Hume believes that there is no connection between these bundles. Therefore, since there is no connection between these bundles, we cannot be certain that they are the same person. Since everything is constantly changing, we are continually changing as well, and those changes are bundles of perception distinct from each other. Therefore, there is no me that persists over time, and there is no persistence in identity.

So, in a nutshell, Hume argues that there is no persistence in identity because our identity lies in our perception, and since our perception changes continuously, then there is no persistence in our identity. I believe there is a logical inconsistency between this argument and the person making the argument. One cannot hold the proposition “there is no persistence in identity”, and expect his idea “there is no persistence in identity” to hold as well. The question will be, is the person who stated “there is no persistence in identity”, the same person who finished the statement? If “they” are the same person, then it implies that there is persistence in identity. If they are not the same person, how can the person sustain an argument he did not even propose? For example, Hume A started a discussion, and as a result of no persistence in identity, Hume B is stuck, trying to defend what Hume A said. So how can Hume B support an argument that Hume A proposed? Would it be ethical and considerate to subject Hume B to such a difficult circumstance? Trying to answer these questions exposes the logical inconsistencies with the idea that there is no persistence in identity proposed by Hume.

There is yet another problem with Hume’s bundle of selves theory. Hume’s theory implicitly suggests an idea of self that is tangible, that can be perceived, sensed, or touched. However, the idea of ‘self,’ which makes one unique from others, is not supposed to be something material that can be perceived, for if it is something that can be perceived, then it is longer the defining property that differentiates an individual. If it can be perceived, then there is a possibility that others can learn of it, possibly

produce it for themselves (if producible), and then it becomes something an individual shares with others.

Furthermore, let us assume that this self is a thing (a material thing) that the senses can perceive. Hume's theory will also fail as well because it is the 'self' that perceives itself, and a self cannot perceive itself when it perceives. For example, when we look at an object, we look at it from a specific point of view. However, we do not perceive that point of view; instead, we perceive an object from that point of view. According to the theory, the "self" is what really senses things, but just as we cannot see the microscope while gazing through its lenses, we too cannot see the "self" when experiencing the perception of things. Since we cannot sense the "self" during perception, it does not follow that there is no self; rather, it suggests that we are unable to detect the self.

1.2 Alfred Jules Ayer (Body Theory)

A.J. Ayer proposed a body criterion to account for persistence in identity. Ayer argues that personal identity persists over time because one remains in the same body from birth to death (Ayer, 1963). Ayer's viewpoint has real appeal since it is quite clear that the body is assumed to be the unifying factor that underlies one's experiences, much as how a succession of experiences constitutes one person's experiences (Ayer, 1963). Without the body, "not only is it not clear how the individual experiences are to be identified but there appears to be no principle according to which they can be grouped together; there is no answer to the question what makes two experiences which are separate in time the experiences of the same self" (Ayer, 1963:113–114). Ayer holds that experiences must be related in some way. Memory, however, is unable to act as this connection since recalling an event calls into question whether or not one believes they are their own. The body is the only choice that exists.

By adopting a reductionist perspective and restricting any references to a person's identity to concerns about a body or a specific portion of the body, such as the brain, this theory, according to Patrick Bailey, aims to answer the issues with Cartesian dualism (Bailey, 2004:68). Bailey (2004) went further to propose that two primary claims support the bodily criterion; (a) the conviction that it is unjustified to attribute our identity to the soul since there is no solid proof for the existence of immaterial things like the soul. Then (b), people supposedly appear to move in the exact directions

as the brain (Bailey, 2004:68). This suggests that our identity lies in our body, and its persistence over time rests on the idea that we cannot change the body in our lifetime.

Very simply, A. J. Ayer argues that identity lies in the body and persists over time because one remains in the same body from birth to death. From a common-sense point of view, it seems reasonable to think that since we maintain the same body from birth to death, we are the same person. It also seems reasonable to believe that one cannot change their body or acquire a new body. However, there is something not adding up in Ayer's proposal. Though one does not change their body, one does not contain the same identical biological stuff that one possessed when one was born. For instance, the stratified squamous epithelia, which are tissues made up of multiple layers of cells resting on a basement membrane and have squamous cells in the superficial layer, repeatedly change, as do red blood cells because they only live for four months, the bones undergo remodeling after ten years, and other changes. These biological changes occur in our bodies at various periods in our lives. This implicitly suggests that a new physical version of themselves constantly replaces the old version over a while. So the case by Ayer that we maintain the same body from birth to death seems questionable.

1.3 John Locke (Memory Theory)

Locke posited a memory theory. Locke's main argument is that what makes us who we are is a non-physical attribute; it is our consciousness (Locke, 1690). This is possible, according to Locke, because our "consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes everyone to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e., the sameness of a rational being" (Locke, 1690:115). So our identity is our consciousness (memory), but how do we account for our persistence? Since one may hold onto memories of oneself at various times, and each of those memories is linked to the one before it, Locke contends that identity persists through time (Locke, 1690). He states that "and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one" (Locke, 1690:115). Locke suggests that one does not need to remember everything in detail, but so far, one remembers being in a condition, then a memory link has been established, and they are

the same person. So, for example, if I do not remember the book or the article I was reading on Sunday, but I remember reading on Sunday, Locke will say that I am still the same person, for I was able to remember that I was reading at a particular time on Sunday.

John Locke posits a memory theory, where he argues that the essential attribute of our identity is our memory. So we persist in identity because we can remember who we are over time. The obvious problem with this theory is the problem of lost memory or false memory. If memory makes us who we are, it implies that when we can no longer remember or do not remember correctly, we are no longer the same person. This theory suggests that people in hospitals or at home suffering from dementia are no longer the same people they were before their sickness. Similarly, those in a vegetative state or those in a coma who do not record any even around them and do not remember what has been happening around them are no longer the same persons they were before the sickness.

This raises the issue of being responsible for others. For instance, if we operate by Locke's theory and hold that anybody who could not remember who they were, is no longer the same person, do we owe them any responsibility, maybe as a family member, to take care of them? If we go by Locke's theory, taking care of those people is no longer out of the sense of being responsible for a family member because the person in question is no longer a part of the family but a new and entirely different person. Understanding the possibility of these problems raises concerns over the sufficiency of Locke's memory theory to account for personal identity and its persistence.

1.4 Derek Parfit (Psychological Continuity)

Derek Parfit (1971) argues that the idea of personal identity does not matter, especially when talking about how one survives over time. He argues that most of the proposition from previous philosophers regarding our personal identity was based on trivial fact. He writes, "certain important questions [regarding survival, memory, and responsibility] do presuppose a question about personal identity. But they can be freed of this presupposition. And when they are, the question about identity has no importance" (Parfit, 1971:4). To justify his claim, Parfit explains that the memory and body theory will collapse when either one of the body cells or one single memory destroys. The body cell or the memory is what Parfit refers to as trivial factors, factors

that can be easily lost. Since those properties identified by other philosophers can be easily lost, Parfit concludes that we are mistaken in assuming that personal identity is what matters in survival or persistence in identity; relatively, psychological connectedness (namely, of memory and character) and its continuity (overlapping chains of strong connectedness). He states, “Whether it is me that survives teleportation does not really matter; what matters is whether there is someone psychologically continuous with me” (Parfit, 1971:9). Parfit presented a thought experiment where he suggests that if a replica of me is being created, which has precisely the same psychological component as me, my original body will then be destroyed in a few minutes; he then asked whether I should be worried that I will cease to exist. Parfit thinks I should not be worried about this circumstance for any reason. He argues that one survives such a procedure since one’s replica uniquely resembles the person and will be psychologically connected to the person that would be destroyed. Parfit also suggests that psychological connectedness can come in degrees (Parfit, 1971:15). If the memories and experience are fresh, then I am strongly connected to the person, but if the experience and memories are fading, then I am, in a loose sense, connected to the person. In other words, the fresher the experience, the higher in degree, and the more connected I am to that person. For instance, if I was a bully in high school, I should not feel bad about it now because it has been a long time, and I am no longer strongly connected to that person. But whatever I did last year, I am very much connected to that person because there is a higher degree of connectedness between the persons. So, in a nutshell, Parfit thinks that there is nothing like personal identity, and my survival over time depends on a higher degree of connectedness with my past experiences.

Parfit’s theory helps us account for a change in character over time. However, it is more of a similar argument to Locke’s memory theory but slightly modified. The big difference between this theory and Locke’s theory is that it argues for the sameness of substance which Locke is totally against. However, like Locke’s theory, Parfit’s theory has its problem that pertains to the loss of memory. But first, the claim that there is no persistence in identity is logically inconsistent, as we had seen before when we looked at Hume’s bundle of selves argument. Secondly, the ascription of our essential attribute to our memory faces the problem of false memory and the possibility of dementia, just like the issues Locke’s theory had. Thirdly and most importantly, this theory allows for a double existence, which I think is absurd. For example, he argues that it is possible

for one to be cloned and the original body destroyed, yet one still exists insofar that one has a psychological connection with the cloned body. I worry that if what makes me unique and different from others can be extracted, and put into another body, then it is not what makes me unique after all; it is more like other body properties. And if I can exist as two persons with the same memory and psychological connectedness, then I am not unique after all. This suggests that psychological connectedness seems not to be the essential property of our identity; instead, it can be duplicated.

There are other theories of personal identity that I might not look at extensively. One of the theories is the Name theory. This theory tries to establish that there is persistence in identity by ascribing the essential attribute of our personal identity to our names. It states that we are the same person because we maintain the same name. This argument is naïve because one can easily change their name and still maintain their status, family, relationship, memory, responsibilities etc. For example, I can easily change my name from Peter to Paul, all I need is to go to court and swear an affidavit, and then I will publish it in the newspapers. But still, I am responsible for an action I did prior to changing my name, and I still own all my properties and certificates. Hence, it shows that my name is not what makes me who I am but for identification purposes in society. What is the essential attribute that makes a person who they are then?

2 The Essential Attribute of a Person

I have critically examined some of the theories that tried to account for the essential attribute of a person, and I found all of them insufficient to account for personal identity for various reasons, and the main reason that they all ascribe personal identity to things that are either changeable, divisible or can be lost. I am looking for that attribute that is neither changeable, divisible, nor can be lost. This attribute is what Aristotle refers to as ‘what it is said to be in virtue of itself’ (1029b, 10-15).

The philosopher David Bostock (2006) explains that what makes us who we are and the same person over time has to be immaterial, and such a thing has to be our essence. He states that “it is the thing’s essence that supplies its criterion of identity over time, and thus enables it to be a substance” (Bostock, 2006: 35). Bostock is suggesting that our essence is what survives overtime and makes us the same person irrespective of the glaring changes. This means that what has no essence cannot be a

substance, and what has no substance does not have an identity and cannot persist over time.

Aristotle refers to this substance as the form. According to Aristotle's *Categories*, the most defining characteristic of substance is its ability to endure changes in the contraries. He states, "It seems most distinctive of substance that what is numerically one and the same is able to receive contraries" (4a, 10–11). Aristotle suggests that though changes do occur, the substance does not change, for it remains the same. He further thinks that a substance can only be destroyed, if possible, by destroying its form and matter (317a, 20-27), and this might not be possible because form cannot be destroyed. This suggests that the essential property, which makes someone the same over time, is the form. According to Jennifer Whiting (1986), who agrees with Aristotle's assertion, identity over time for substances consists in sameness of form, which necessitates that the forms of co-specific persons be numerically unique from one another.

One could ask, what does Aristotle mean when he argues that form persists over time? To explain this claim better, Aristotle states that "for it is impossible for a thing still to remain the same if it is entirely transferred out of its species, just as the same animal could not at one time be, and at another not be, a man" (125b 35–39). This suggests that the form, as suggested by Aristotle, cannot be held or shared with others, for it is unique and personal to a person. This does not mean that other humans do not possess form; they do, just that individuals possess a form that makes them human and distinct from animals, and further, this form is so unique that it also differentiates individuals from other human persons. Thus, for a human being to remain numerically the same as it changes, it must remain in the form of a human being and persist over time. A persistent substance must retain the ability to do the distinctive actions that members of its kind are capable of because, in Aristotle's view, kinds are individuated by what they can accomplish. As a result, the form explains why a material remains constant across time. According to Aristotle, form is the mechanism through which the constituent parts of a single material combine to produce a single object rather than a collection of objects. And this form belongs to a substance "either alone or chiefly, primarily, and in the unqualified sense" (1031a, 10-15).

There is a pertinent question that needs answering. Why should we accept Bostock and Aristotle's suggestion over the others, which I have criticized in the previous section?

To begin with, this article aims to show how the doctrine of act and potency explains persistence in identity. To do so, I had to explain and evaluate various theories that provided an account of personal identity and how it persists over time. Most theories identified characteristics that either does not persist over time or do not fully account for personal identity. So when those theories are explained through the doctrine of act and potency, it shows that those characteristics they identified are in potency and cannot hold as essential characteristics that explain personal identity and its persistence over time. The following section will then answer why Bostock and Aristotle captured the essential characteristic that explains personal identity.

So thus far, we have arrived at the point where we could say that what makes a person the same over time is the essence, according to Bostock, and the form, according to Aristotle. Though different terms, a similar concept for both the essence and the form suggests that what makes us who we are over time is immaterial, which means that it cannot be seen, felt, or touched, and it cannot be destroyed, and, most importantly, persists over time. I have to clarify here that form and essence might not mean the same thing, but in this context, they do. Essence is considered an object or an idea's innate character, whereas form has to do with shape. Thomas Ainsworth (2020) argues that when referring to artifacts, Aristotle's usage of the word "form" may give the false impression that what is gained in a significant creation is only a shape. For example, it is plausible that a bronze state's form is nothing more than its shape. However, according to Ainsworth (2020), it becomes clear that having the proper shape is not enough to possess the form when we consider organisms. This is because "a thing's form is its definition or essence—what it is to be a human being, for example. A statue may be human-shaped, but it is not a human because it cannot perform the functions characteristic of humans: thinking, perceiving, moving, desiring, eating and growing, etc" (Ainsworth, 2020). So, in this context, form, and essence refers to the same thing, which is what it is to be something.

That being said, other questions need addressing. For instance, how can the form/essence persist over time? In other words, how can we understand this persistence over time theory? I argue that understanding the doctrine of act and potency helps demystify the persistence theory. When we understand that the form is in actuality and thus cannot be changed, then we can better understand how what makes us who we are cannot be changed over time. Understanding better and explaining the doctrine of act and potency is critical to advancing this essay further.

3 The Doctrine of Act-Potency and its relationship with form and matter

Aristotle developed the doctrine of act and potency. It involves a duality of principles to explain the nature of finite beings or substances. Act can be referred to as a universal perfective principle, whereas potency can be referred to as individualizing limiting principle capable of receiving perfection. Aristotle argues that the composition of these two principles can be seen in every finite being or substance (1042a, 24-31). Bernard Wuellner explains it well when he states, “whatever is must be either pure act or a unit composed of potency and act as its primary and intrinsic principles” (Wuellner, 1956: 120).

In substances, like the material substance, the actualizing principle is the form. The form can be defined as “that precisely in the virtue of which a thing is called a this” or “that by which a particular thing actually exists” (Milne, 1973:2). Form is the actualizing principle because it determines the material substance to be the particular thing it is. This suggests that the form determines the specific class or species to which the thing belongs.

Conjoined with the principle of form is the principal Matter. Matter “is of itself neither a particular thing, nor of a particular quantity nor otherwise positively characterized” (1029a, 20-25) or “that which is not as such a particular thing, but in mere potency to become a particular thing” (Milne, 1973:2). Considered in itself, the matter is pure potency and has no actuality until it is conjoined with or actualized by form. In turn, matter limits or individuates form, which is in itself, universal, making the substance in which the two principles inhere a particular or individual being or substance. Together the two principles are referred to as the essence of a material substance.

A substance is said to be in potency if it has the power to move or to change, or to be moved or to be changed (Aristotle, 1961:231). Potency is actualized either innately, e.g., in human cells, bones etc., or by practice, e.g., walking, playing flute etc. One thing is clear; a substance is actualized only if it has potency. On the other hand, actuality is understood as a substance’s end, goal, or purpose. It is the presence of a thing that is not subject to change or movement (Aristotle, 1961:233). A substance is in actuality, when it has completed its motion and thus has realized its goal.

Aristotle argues that act is prior to potency in three scenes; in concept, in time, and in substance (Reale, 1980:222). In concept, Aristotle argues that since potency is

understood as the capacity to pass into act, then to have the concept of potency, we must necessarily have the concept of act first. If there is no act, then it becomes unclear what a substance is in potency and whether it is actually potency (*ibid*).

In time, Aristotle argues that everything that is produced is produced of something, for nothing comes from nothing (Reale,1980:222). This implies that for there to be a substance, it must have been produced by another substance. For example, a mango tree is an actualized mango seed. But a mango seed is a potential mango tree as well. This implies that for there to be a mango seed, there necessarily has to be a mango tree. According to Aristotle, this means that anything that has the potency to change or move ought to be produced by that which is in actuality (*ibid*).

In substance, Aristotle argues that a substance that is in actuality is prior to a substance that is in potentiality because that which has actualized its goal is perfect. For example, an acorn is a potential oak tree, but an oak tree is an actualized acorn. Suggesting that which has actualized its goal is prior to that which has not (Reale,1980:223).

So what Aristotle is explaining is that whatever is in potency has the potential to change into something else. However, whatever is in actuality, does not change, for it is already in its perfect form. So how does this doctrine help us to understand persistence in identity?

4 How the Doctrine of Act and Potency is a key to understanding Persistence in Identity

Here, I argue that what makes us who we are properties that are, in actuality, and thus they are incapable of undergoing change. Thus suggesting that the person remains the same over time, for what makes them whom they are cannot change. To explain better, I will consider Edward Feser's understanding of Aristotle's doctrine of Act and Potency.

Edward Feser explains that Parmenides and Zeno denied the reality of change. Parmenides thinks that change is impossible because for change to happen, it must arise from nothingness, and nothing can arise from nothingness (Feser, 2014:34). Feser explains that Aristotle would be against Parmenides's claim that change means arising from nothing. He states that for Aristotle, "change involves, not being arising from non-being, but rather one kind of being arising from another kind" (Feser,

2014:35). To explain this, Feser made a distinction between Aristotle's being-in-act and being-in-potency. Being-in-act means the way a thing is, and being-in-potency means the way things could potentially be (Feser, 2014:35). The idea here for Aristotle is that change could happen to a being that is in potency. And such change does not arise from anything but from what is already in existence which has the capacity to change. However, a change could not happen to a being-in-act because it is in the state it is supposed to be, and it is not capable of any changes.

To understand being-in-act and being-in-potency, Aristotle distinguished between Substantial change and Accidental change. Substantial change is the change of essence or the change of kind. E.J. Lowe defines substantial change as when something ceases to exist or something new begins to exist (Lowe, 1998:174). This is a change from one kind to another, e.g., a change from human to animal. Accidental changes are changes that do not affect the nature of a thing. Lowe refers to this as a phase change. He believes it to be a change that does not affect the substance. It is a change whereby an individual substance undergoes specific qualitative changes and continues to exist as a given substance (Lowe, 1998:175). Hence, being-in-act can be referred to as the substantial attributes of a person that is in the state that s/he is supposed to be and is not capable of changing to any other state. Being-in-potency then is referred to as accidental property that can undergo several changes.

So now, we have seen that the problem with most doctrines that try to explain persistence in identity is that they use accidental properties in potency, for they have the capacity to change as that which persists over time. By doing so, they either conclude that there is no persistence over time or that what they identified does not persist over time. So, the doctrine of act and potency will help to explain that we undergo various changes, but those changes are in relation to our accidental properties, which have the potential to change, and which do not make us who we are. That is why we are still the same person over time despite some glaring changes. So, what persists over time is our essence (form) which is in actuality, and what changes over time is our material body (matter) which is in potentiality.

5 Relevance of Persistence in Identity debate in our daily lives

Although this article does not look at the moral, political, and ethical perspectives on this issue, it thus presents how it can be viewed ethically or morally by

exploring how this issue is relevant in our contemporary world. The question is, does it really matter that I know what makes me the same over time? One can conceptualize that as long as I can go to work, pay bills and be with my loved ones, the persistent identity issue is purely nonsensical. This particular way of thinking seems to be the problem, and another problem is that people think that the issue of identity is merely a conceptual puzzle, but it is more than that. It has to do with knowing how to live one's life. It considers our responsibility and obligations to our loved ones and society. For example, if one believes that one has obligations to their loved ones, then one should really know whether the people they are responsible to are the same persons, and one should also know whether people see them as the same person. If we are not the same person, how do we expect to be promoted in our jobs or even be paid for the job we did? How are we expected to punish somebody who committed a crime if the person is no longer the same person that committed the crime? The fact is that everything in society revolves around individuals being the same person they were. Hence it is not just a philosophical problem but our daily living problem. But we should not believe we are the same person over time without sufficient reason to do so. Hence the debate of our persistence over time remains a relevant debate in our current world. The focus of this paper was not on the ethical and moral perspective but finds how it is important to be explored in the section. I suggest that a study on the ethical and moral implications of understanding persistence in identity is essential and should be explored.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it has become apparent that there are challenging issues associated with the many responses to personal identity persistence. But it is still true that many people feel there is a persistent self, notwithstanding what Hume claimed. The bodily criteria suggested by Ayer seem problematic, especially when considering that our bodies change over time, and we are not in the body from birth to death. The issue of loss of memory remains an insurmountable problem for memory theory and thus suggests that it might now account for persistence in identity. I argued that these problems with these theories become apparent when we look at them from the light of Aristotle's doctrine of Act and Potence. This doctrine helped explain how the essence (those properties that make us who we are) remains the same over time, despite those glaring changes in our physical makeup, because the essence/form is in the state of

actuality and, thus, cannot change. Therefore, I suggested that it is only by understanding Aristotle's doctrine of Act and Potency that we could have an adequate understanding of persistence in personal identity. To be clear, I looked at the issue of personal identity from a metaphysical perspective and suggested a critical study of the moral and ethical perspectives regarding these issues. Questions like, why should I still love my partner if they are not the same person I married, could be addressed in such a study. Although this article would argue that it is important to treat others the same, for they remain the same despite some glaring changes, for those changes are accidental changes, what makes us who we are, remains the same over time.

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